DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 358 791 HE 026 522

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TITLE The Varied Roles of TRIO Programs in the Accreditation Process.
PUB DATE Apr 93
NOTE 10p.; Speech delivered at the Presidential Breakfast of the Mid-Eastern Association of Educational Opportunity Programs (Alexandria, VA, April 1993).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Academic Achievement; Academic Freedom; *Accreditation (Institutions); Administrator Responsibility; College Administration; *Educational Planning; *Educational Quality; Higher Education; Institutional Mission; Instructional Improvement; Mission Statements; *Organizational Objectives; Policy Formation; School Policy; Self Evaluation (Groups)
IDENTIFIERS *TRIO Programs

ABSTRACT

This speech examines what areas of responsibilities and services are provided by TRIO programs and their role in the college accrediting process. Areas of accrediting found to be supported and fostered by TRIO programs are highlighted and include the following: (1) the development of mission statements, goals, and objectives appropriate to the institution's resources and the needs of its constituents; (2) the development of humane and equitable policies for dealing with students, staff, and faculty; (3) admissions policies clearly stated and related to the goals and resources of the institution with information about financial requirements, aid, and refunds openly available; (4) clear definitions of administrative and academic responsibilities, within a secure framework of academic freedom; and (5) stability of resources to maintain the quality of instruction and services and assure their continuity. It is noted that TRIO project goals are measurable by both time and numerical standards, and many projects have reported exceeding their own standards and those for student performance. The speech concludes with the observation that, in the process of accreditation or reaccreditation, there is a need for the involvement of TRIO personnel in an institution's self-study process. (GLR)

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By
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Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools
Commission on Higher Education

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Whether TRIO programs are housed in the academic affairs or student affairs divisions on the campus, they have a vital role to play in the accrediting process. As managers of programs that provide many types of services directly to students, TRIO directors not only supervise staffs, and administer budgets but must determine resource needs through planning structures using outcomes assessment data as the basis for decision making. Upward Bound or Veterans' Upward Bound projects, or a Special Services project or Talent Search program or Educational Opportunity Center or Ronald E. McNair Post-Baccalaureate Degree program may contribute significantly to the realization of institutional mission, goals and objectives. TRIO programs are required to track students. Student support services projects are required to document student retention and graduation rates. Through the proposal evaluation process, they are judged based on those retention and graduation rates. In the proposal process, TRIO programs must document specific ways they assure the participation of groups that are traditionally underserved by colleges and universities. TRIO programs bring low income first generation to college students to the campus, many of whom would not get there by any other means. In a very real way, staff members substitute for family, serve as mentors and advisors. Upward Bound and Talent Search programs expose students to higher

education processes and facilitate learning through academic year and summer programs. As such, they fulfill most missions of most community colleges - to promote educational programs and activities to people of different income levels with different levels of aspirations. Many four year colleges and universities use TRIO programs to improve their affirmative action efforts, often with little or not extra cost to the institution. Many of the TRIO programs have been documented in the literature to have increased educational aspirations and actual achievement by providing motivating workshops, caring empathic role models and mentors, and cultural and educational activities to high school and college students and/or non-traditional transitional students. TRIO personnel are sometimes used as members of sub-committees during self-study, particularly on those examining student services. They are sometimes on sub-committees examining external relations. They are more occasionally on sub-committees examining admissions and financial aid policies. The budgets of TRIO programs contribute significantly, on some campuses, to the total pool of federal dollars secured by the institution. Statistics on students are often used or cited as a demonstration of institutional commitment to special populations or to affirmative action.

Some of the standards or common denominators for institutional accreditation, developed and judged by the peer institutions in the Middle States region, and published in the Characteristics of Excellence in Higher Education, can be used to demonstrate the role of TRIO programs in the accreditation process.

- "the integrity with which an institution treats its constituencies, respects the public interest, and maintains responsibilities for all of its activities;
- clearly stated mission, goals and objectives appropriate to the institution's resources and the needs of its constituents;
- humane and equitable policies for dealing with students, staff and faculty;
- programs and courses which develop abilities to form independent judgment, to weigh values, to understand fundamental theory, and to live in a culturally diverse world;
- curricula which provide, emphasize, or rest upon education in the arts and sciences, even when they are attuned to professional or occupational requirements.
- persistent attention to the relation between goals and outcomes;
- admissions policies clearly stated and related to the goals and resources of the institution with information about financial requirements, aid, and refunds openly available;
- an atmosphere conducive to continuing and broadening each student's education beyond the minimum level necessary to obtain credits,

certificates, or degrees;

- student services appropriate to the maturity and degree level of the students enrolled;
- counseling sensitive to the educational, personal and career needs and aspirations of students;
- clear definitions of administrative and academic responsibilities, within a secure framework of academic freedom;
- faculty with professional qualifications appropriate to the mission and goals of the institution, committed to continuous intellectual and professional development;
- organization and administration which facilitate teaching and learning and foster their improvement.
- a governing board actively fulfilling its responsibilities of policy and resource development;
- perceptive, imaginative, and on going institutional self-study and planning procedures aimed at intensifying effectiveness in higher education;
- physical facilities and library/learning resources appropriate to the requirements and nature of the institution's programs and functions;
- stability of resources to maintain the quality of instruction and services and assure their continuity;

. the honesty and accuracy of an institution's publications and public relations." [Characteristics of Excellence in Higher Education. pp. 5-6.] Collectively, the standards or Characteristics of Excellence sound as though they represent a philosophical statement of the intent of TRIO programs as well as a representation of some of the criteria used by field readers to judge TRIO applications.

In order for a TRIO program to be on a campus, the College or University signs numerous assurance certifications that speak to the institution's integrity. In addition to these certifications, all necessary for federal funding, institutions are assessed by field readers, as a part of the competitive application procedure, on how effective institutional polices are in assuring fair and equitable treatment to TRIO students. Some of the policies judged include those on admissions criteria, financial aid and scholarship award philosophies, and grading. Field readers examine the use of assessment data in project planning each year, as a part of the on-going Department of Education assessment of how well projects meet their goals. TRIO project goals are measurable by both time and numerical standards. "By the end of the first year, 15% of student support services project participants will have a 2.0 grade point average." Indeed many projects have documented not only how they've exceeded their own standards but how their students have exceeded the performance of less at risk students. On many

campuses TRIO students, go through regular admissions but on many; TRIO students are special admissions students who, with additional services, may do as well or better than other students on the campus. There is a definite relationship between goal attainment and the budget, linking the planning process and objectives accomplishment to project resources. Accountability is taught and demonstrated by TRIO projects in the annual reports filed with the U. S. Department of Education and judged as a part of the proposal competition through both direct scoring and prior year experience points.

The proposal process, itself, is consistent with the spirit, nature and intent of accreditation. The process of reading and evaluating proposals is collegial. The pay, given the work, has ranged from totally voluntary to a stipend. The work far outweighs the renumeration. For the most part, field readers are campus peers. Like accreditation, what is written in the proposal, as in the self-study, gets evaluated with a reading. TRIO proposal review is a smaller group decision than an accreditation decision which is determined by a larger group. Unlike proposal review, in accreditation, there is a team visit. Just as a Commissioner and MSA/CHE staff person reads the self-study and makes a determination of an accreditation recommendation, so, too, does the U. S. Department of Education staff determine prior year experience points based on the quality of the program as judged by criteria related to goal attainment in annual reports.

TRIO personnel sometimes work with the faculty in developing

appropriate teaching strategies for students; particularly learning and physically disabled students. In this process, TRIO personnel significantly improve the teaching learning climate for TRIO and other students. TRIO programs have often been institutional sources for special learning resources, often not available elsewhere on the campus. In some places, particularly those with large numbers of eligible students, TRIO funds fully support the institutional tutorial center or learning resources center on campus. TRIO funds are a major institutional resource. The types of counseling provided by TRIO programs are totally consonant with the MSA/CHE standard on counseling.

Although TRIO programs have and will continue to play a role in institutional accreditation or reaccreditation, there is a need for the involvement of more TRIO personnel in the self-study process. As a direct result of TRIO training grants, most directors and many staffers are proficient with the assessment of goals and objectives and developing budgets based on planned and unplanned need shifts. These individuals can be invaluable to institutions as they go through self-study. TRIO personnel have direct experience in working with students who fall under policies that relate to admission, retention and graduation. TRIO personnel know where institutional glitches are. They know the availability or lack of availability of other student support services, which faculty go the extra mile with pro student advisement and which counselors are proactive. Experienced TRIO personnel are, by definition, perceptive and imaginative. Many projects have regular

on-going publications that are disseminated on the campus and to broader communities, some with state, regional or national audiences. To see what TRIO personnel accomplished at any institution is to revisit the standards for accreditation. To omit TRIO personnel directly from the self-study process is to eliminate a valuable resource from the self-study process. The institutional data pool can be greatly enhanced by the on-going self reflection and changes evident in the reports, studies and publications of TRIO programs. To my TRIO colleagues and friends, I say share your reports, publications, and accomplishments with your presidents, and volunteer for institutional committees so that you'll be the natural choice for a self-study Steering Committee or sub-committee slot. To the presidents and vice presidents, I say don't underestimate the expertise of TRIO personnel in the on-going self-study process for re-accreditation. Thank you.

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